



DRAFT
Decision Notice and
Finding of No Significant Impact for
Board Camp Project
Polk County, Arkansas

Responsible Agency:
US Forest Service
Ouachita National Forest
Mena and Oden Ranger District

Responsible Official:
Tim Oosterhous, District Ranger
1603 Highway 71 North
Mena, AR 71953

For Further Information Contact:
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479-394-2382

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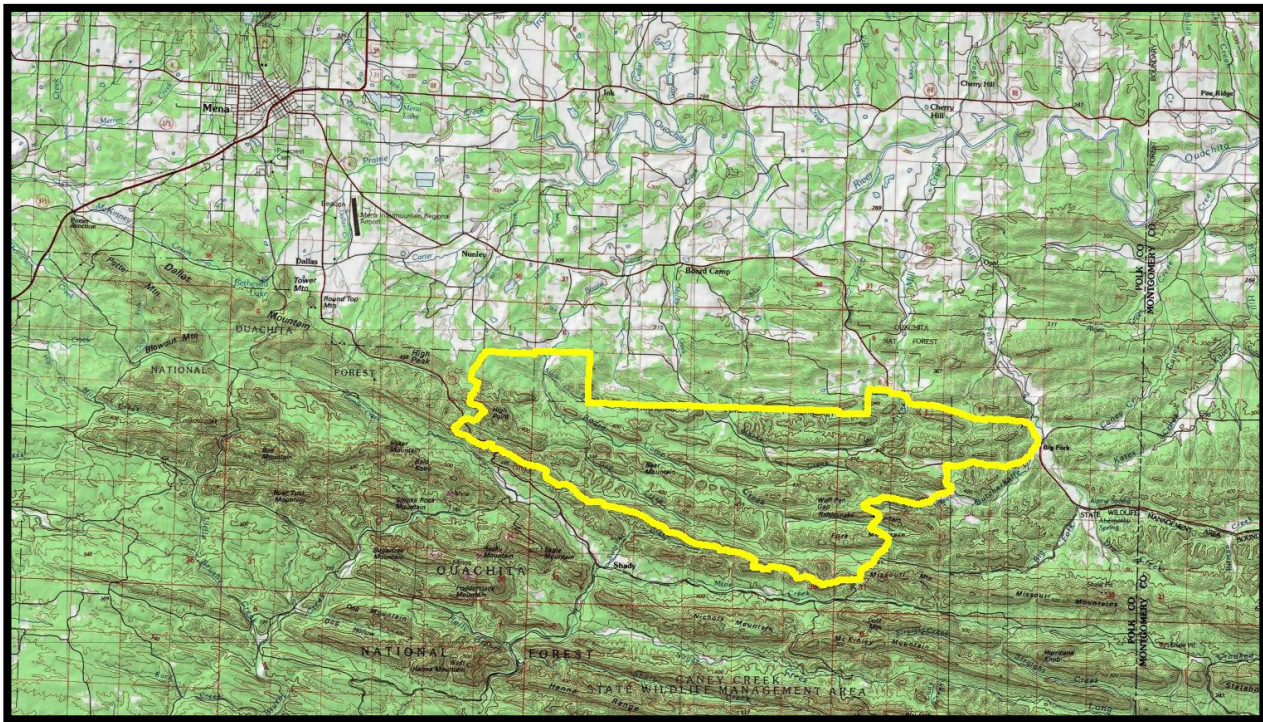
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Background

The analysis area of Board Camp is composed of Compartments 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917 and 919. Geographically, the project area is primarily to the south of Mena, Arkansas, in Township 3S, Range 28W, Sections 7,8, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 30, and 31 and T3S, R29W, Sections 7, 13-18, 19-24, 25-29 and 35-36, T3S, R30W Sections 11-14 and 24 in Polk County, Arkansas. The proposed action will occur in Management Areas (MA) 9, and 14. The existing conditions in this watershed were compared to the ONF Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Forest Plan, USDA Forest Service, 2005a) as directed by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requirements. Management opportunities were proposed and analyzed in order to move the watershed toward desired condition(s) as stated in the Revised Forest Plan.

Figure 1: Board Camp Project Area Vicinity Map





Proposed Action

The Mena-Oden Ranger District proposes to implement the following management activities*:

- Commercial thinning – 1,460 acres
- Plantation Thinning – 491 acres
- Seed tree with reserves – 573 acres
- Site preparation by chainsaws, prescribed burning, herbicide application, or mechanical means – 573 acres
- Hand plant shortleaf pine seedlings (if necessary) – 573 acres
- Stand improvement by release using chainsaws or herbicides – 573 acres
- Stand improvement by precommercial thinning (PCT) chainsaw using chainsaws – 573 acres
- Pretreatment/Stocking/TSI certification checks – 573 acres
- Fuel reduction prescribed burning – 2,149 acres
- Non-native invasive, exotic, and nuisance plant species treatment – 12,889¹ acres
- Wildlife pond rehabilitation – 11 ponds
- Wildlife opening rehabilitation – 16 acres
- Wildlife stand improvement midstory reduction – 1,564 acres
- Shale borrow site use – 2 acres
- Temporary road construction – 11 miles
- Road reconstruction – 1 mile
- Road closure – 1 mile
- Road maintenance – 37 miles
- Trail maintenance – 32 miles
- Soil and water restoration – 320 acres
- Unauthorized road and trail closure – as needed
- Install gates and berms – as needed
- Firewood cutting areas – as needed

*All figures are approximate.

Decision

Based on the analysis documented in the Board Camp Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement the Proposed Action. My decision is based on a review of the environmental analysis, project record and public comments received, which includes a thorough review of relevant scientific information and consideration of comments received.

Reason for the Decision

The **purpose** of this action is to restore the health and vigor of the Board Camp area. Implementing these activities would provide for a diversity of plant and animal communities throughout the Board Camp area, provide early seral habitat in a well-distributed grass/forb or shrub/seedling stage, reduce fuel accumulation, and produce a sustainable yield of wood products. Contrasts between the current conditions in the project area and the Revised Forest Plan's desired conditions identify the **need** for this action, namely:



- Current conditions in the Board Camp area do not meet the desired conditions for the forest Management Areas (MA's) and the ecological systems that occur within.
- Past fire suppression activities have removed the natural role of fire from the landscape. This absence of fire has resulted in excessive fuel accumulations, increasing the risk of damage to resources in the event of wildfire.
- The absence of fire has also resulted in reduced open understories necessary for the growth of many native plant communities, wildlife foods, and the natural regeneration of pine and oak.
- Pine stands contain damaged, poorly formed and diseased trees. The trees are overcrowded or densely stocked, which reduces growth and crown development. These conditions result in stress and reduced vigor and health, thus increasing susceptibility to insects and disease.
- There is limited access to those stands in need of silvicultural treatment, resulting in the need for temporary road construction. Some existing roads are not useable by log trucks for hauling, creating the need for road re-construction.
- There is a lack of high quality forage and a lack of nesting habitat for species requiring early successional habitat within the project area.
- Standing water throughout the Board Camp area is needed for consumption by wildlife and as reproductive sites for native amphibian species.
- There is a lack of suitable natural cavities for nesting within the project area.
- There are known populations of exotic and invasive plant species throughout the project area.

I selected the Proposed Action because:

- It provides more effective tools for the control of non-native invasive species than the No Herbicide Alternative;
- The No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose and need for this project.

Public Involvement

This action was listed as a proposal on the Ouachita National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions in November 2019 and was updated throughout the analysis. A Project Announcement Letter or "scoping letter" was mailed to interested publics on November 21, 2019, requesting input on the proposal regarding management of the Board Camp Project area; One comment were received. The 30-day notice and comment period for the proposed action documented in the EA began on January 12, 2020. No comments were received. Public comments received during scoping were used to identify alternatives for consideration.

Issues Identified

Based on concerns raised in past projects, the following issues were analyzed in depth:

- **Issue 1:** Herbicide use may create a safety hazard to workers and forest visitors

Alternatives Considered

I approved three alternatives for the interdisciplinary (ID) team to evaluate and document in detail:



- Proposed Action - as described on page 1 and in the EA
- No Herbicide - same as the Proposed Action except there would be no herbicide application; only manual and mechanical methods would be used for vegetation management
- No Action – the project would not be implemented

The ID team considered other alternatives, but eliminated them from detailed study:

- Optimal Harvest
- Proposed Action without Road Construction
- Proposed Action without Harvest Activity
- Proposed Action without Prescribed Burning

The ID Team concluded that a no road construction alternative would not satisfy the purpose and need of providing at least 6% of the suitable acres in early seral conditions. Under this alternative, no early seral habitat from suitable acres would be created. For these reasons, the ID Team eliminated this alternative from detailed analysis.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in context to society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. In the case of a site-specific action such as the Board Camp project, significance normally depends upon the localized effects rather than in the world as a whole. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact. (40 CFR 1508.27)

Context

The selected alternative is limited in geographic context (40 CFR 1508.27(a)). Only the forested compartments located in rural Polk County, Arkansas, will be managed. The effects of the biophysical actions are bounded by the extent of the project area itself. Socially and economically, most of the effects are highly localized (Polk County, primarily).

Intensity

I considered the following intensity criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27 in my evaluation of severity of impact of the selected alternative.

1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered, and this action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment (EA, Chapter 3).
2. The degree to which public health and safety may be affected is minimal (EA, pp. 46-49).
3. The project will not adversely affect any unique characteristics of the geographic area (historic or cultural resource, wetlands, and floodplains, roadless areas, or wilderness areas). This finding is based on information gathered through records and site-specific field inventories (EA, pp. 31-33 and 37-40).



4. Based on public involvement and analysis conducted in the EA, the effects of the proposed actions on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action (EA, Chapter 3).
5. The actions do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks to the human environment (EA, Chapter 3).
6. The actions in this decision will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because all of the proposed actions have been implemented many times previously on similar sites across the Ouachita National Forest. (EA, Chapter 3).
7. The cumulative effects of the proposed actions have been analyzed with consideration of past and foreseeable future activities on adjacent public and private land, and no significant cumulative effects would result from implementation (EA, Chapter 3).
8. The actions will not affect any sites listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places; and will not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historic resources. This determination is based on site-specific cultural resource surveys conducted on the analysis area, preparation of a Cultural Resources Report, and consultation on the proposed project with the Arkansas State Historic Preservation Officer (EA, p.31).
9. This project is likely to adversely affect the northern long-eared bat; however, there are no effects beyond those previously disclosed in the programmatic biological opinion on implementing the final 4(d) rule dated January 5, 2016, signed by Lynn Lewis. Any taking that may occur incidental to this project is not prohibited under the final 4(d) rule (50 CFR §17.40(o)). This project is consistent with the forest plan, the description of the proposed action in the programmatic biological opinion, and activities that do not require special exemption from taking prohibitions applicable to the northern long-eared bat; therefore, the programmatic biological opinion satisfies the Forest Service's responsibilities under ESA section 7(a) (2) relative to the northern long-eared bat for this project.
10. None of the actions will violate federal, state, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. All actions are consistent with the Revised Forest Plan. The project will be monitored to ensure that Plan requirements are implemented. If project implementation results in effects greater than anticipated, because of unforeseen site factors or events, appropriate corrective measures will be considered and implemented, as appropriate. (EA, Chapter 3).

After considering the effects of the selected alternative in terms of context and intensity, I have determined that the associated actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

I have determined that actions included in this decision are consistent with the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Ouachita National Forest because the selected alternative has been planned and will be implemented in accordance with all applicable design criteria of the Revised Forest Plan.



National Forest Management Act (NFMA)

Under 16 U.S.C. 1604 (g) (3) (E), a Responsible Official may authorize site-specific projects and activities on NFS lands to harvest timber only where:

1. Soil, slope, or other watershed conditions will not be irreversibly damaged;
See EA, Chapter 3
2. There is assurance that the lands can be adequately restocked within five years after final regeneration harvest;
Hand planting will occur if natural regeneration is inadequate (EA, p. 12)
3. Protection is provided for streams, streambanks, shorelines, lakes, wetlands, and other bodies of water from detrimental changes in water temperatures, blockages of water courses, and deposits of sediment where harvests are likely to seriously and adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat;
Protection is provided by adherence to minimum widths of streamside management areas (SMAs), protected areas adjacent to bodies of water and on each side of perennial streams and other streams with defined channels (Revised Forest Plan, pp. 103-104)
4. The harvesting system to be used is not selected primarily because it will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output of timber.
See EA, Purpose & Need, pp.3-5; Proposed Action Description, pp.9-17

A Responsible Official may authorize site-specific projects and activities on NFS lands using clearcutting, seed tree cutting, shelterwood cutting, and other cuts designed to regenerate an even-aged stand of timber as a cutting method only where:

1. For clearcutting, it is determined to be the optimum method; for other cutting methods it is determined to be appropriate and meets the objectives and requirements of the applicable land management plan (16 U.S.C. 1604 (g)(3)(F)(i));
See EA, Purpose & Need, pp. 1-5
2. The interdisciplinary review has been completed and the potential environmental, biological, aesthetic, engineering, and economic impacts on each advertised sale area have been assessed, as well as the consistency of the sale with the multiple use of the general area (16 U.S.C. 1604 (g)(3)(F)(ii));
See EA, Chapter 3
3. Cut blocks, patches, or strips are shaped and blended to the extent practicable with the natural terrain (16 U.S.C. 1604 (g)(3)(F)(iii));
The Scenery Treatment Guide-Southern Region National Forests will be followed (EA, p. 33)
4. These cuts are carried out according to the maximum size limits for areas to be cut in one harvest operation as required by 16 U.S.C. 1604 (g)(3)(F)(iv)).
Cuts are carried out according to the maximum size of regeneration area for even-aged management under Design Criteria FR009 (Revised Forest Plan, p. 81)
5. Timber cuts are carried out in a manner consistent with the protection of soil, watershed, fish, wildlife, recreation, and esthetic resources, and the regeneration of the timber resource (16 U.S.C. 1604 (g) (3) (F) (v)).
See EA, Chapters 2 & 3
6. Under 16 U.S.C. 1604 (m) even-aged stands of trees scheduled for regeneration harvest generally have reached culmination of mean annual increment of growth, unless the purpose of the timber cutting is accepted in the land management plan.
Regeneration harvests are in compliance with Design Criteria FR009, Harvest Age (Revised Forest Plan page 81)



Objection Opportunities

This decision is subject to objection pursuant to 36 CFR 218 and must meet all of the requirements of 36 CFR 218.8. A written objection, including attachments, must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date that notice of this draft decision is published in the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*. Electronic objections in common formats (.doc, .rtf, .pdf, or .txt) may be submitted to: objections-southern-ouachita@fs.fed.us with Subject: Board Camp Project. Objections may also be faxed to (501) 321-5334 to the attention of "OBJECTION: Board Camp Project," sent by mail to:

Forest Supervisor
ATTN: Objections
P.O. Box 1270
Hot Springs, AR 71902

Or hand-delivered during normal business hours of 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays at:

Ouachita National Forest Supervisor's Office
Federal Building, 2nd Floor
100 Reserve Street
Hot Springs, AR

If an objection is received, notice of an objection resolution meeting open to the public will be posted on the Ouachita National Forest website.

Implementation Date

As per 36 CFR 218.12, if no objection is received within the legal objection period, this decision may be signed and implemented on, but not before, the fifth business day following the close of the objection filing period. If an objection is filed, this decision cannot be signed or implemented until the reviewing officer has responded in writing to all pending objections.

Contact

For further information on this decision, contact Jade Ryles, 1603 Hwy 71, Mena, AR 71953; phone (479)-394-2382; email cjryles@fs.fed.us.

Responsible Official

DRAFT DN – Signature Pending – DRAFT DN

TIM OOSTERHOUS
District Ranger

*Date Pending Completion
of Objection Review Process*

DATE